

the democratic order

PARLIAMENT MUST BE REFORMED

**A PROGRAMME FOR DEMOCRATIC
GOVERNMENT**

by IVOR JENNINGS

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THE DEMOCRATIC ORDER

Edited by FRANCIS WILLIAMS

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The Poor Law Code, *Principles of Local Government Law*, *The Law and the Constitution*, *The Law Relating to Local Authorities*, *Parliamentary Reform*, *The Law of Housing*, *Cabinet Government*, and *The Law of Public Health*.

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INTRODUCTION

by FRANCIS WILLIAMS

THIS is a war of ideas : a revolutionary war fought to determine the future of European civilisation. In that conflict military power is important, but the power of the idea is not less important. For we are fighting not simply to destroy the military power of Germany but to defeat the philosophy and idea of Naziism. We are fighting not simply for our own survival but for the survival and future of democracy.

Because we are fighting for these things our purpose will be unfulfilled if we fail to destroy the kind of conditions in our European society which made Naziism possible. To the challenge of the New European Order which Naziism preaches and seeks to impose upon Europe we must reply with a democratic order which shall offer to the people of our own country and of all countries their true inheritance of peace and economic security and social justice and freedom.

To-day democracy, facing its greatest challenge, faces also its greatest opportunity : the opportunity to build, during and after the war, an order of society which shall serve honestly and resolutely " the forward march of the common people in all lands towards their just and true inheritance " of which Mr. Churchill has spoken.

It is to help onward that march that these pamphlets have been planned and written. Their theme is the new democratic order ; the practical steps necessary in economic affairs, finance, industry and agriculture, in political

policy, education and the social services that are needed to establish that order and the growth in our own understanding of the values and ethics of civilisation which is necessary also. They are addressed to all who have faith in democracy and are determined upon victory : to the men and women in factories and workshops, in barracks and training camps, upon farms and upon the wide and dangerous seas, in the bombed cities and the little villages, in homes and schools and offices who are fighting for those great principles of freedom which are the heritage democracy brings to the world and who wish to make sure that this time there shall be no thwarting of just desires and rightful hopes. They are concerned to show that in starting work now upon the building of a true democratic order we shall not only be preparing for a better society after the war but taking a decisive step towards the actual achievement of victory.

For democracy is not only something to fight for, it is something to fight with. It is a weapon in our hands if we use it greatly, and if we use it greatly it will conquer.

PARLIAMENT MUST BE REFORMED

A Programme for Democratic Government

I

PARLIAMENT DURING THE WAR

DURING war much of the normal procedure of parliamentary democracy is suspended. It is inevitable that it should be so. Where there is a coalition government of all the principal parties the effective organised opposition which is the basis of the whole procedure and practice of the House of Commons ceases to exist.

The major part of this pamphlet is therefore concerned with parliamentary reforms which, while they are of urgent importance and are essential to the efficient functioning of parliamentary democracy, must, by the circumstances of the time, wait until the war is over. It is, nevertheless, most desirable that they should be thought about, discussed and decided upon while the war is on so that there may be no unnecessary delay when the moment for reform arrives. Moreover, there is one

reform which ought to be carried through while the war is being fought, as an earnest that the United Kingdom is, and intends to remain, a true democracy. I refer to a diminution in the power of the House of Lords. I will deal with this in greater detail later in this pamphlet.

Most of the reforms I have to put forward must, however, wait until after the war. That does not mean that the parliamentary system as it is functioning during the war is beyond criticism. It is far from being so. It is true that the record of Divisions in the House since the formation of the present Government and the amount of time the House has devoted to the discussion of Public Bills shows that British democracy is far from becoming a temporary dictatorship. The Government has the power necessary to do what is needed for the efficient prosecution of the war, but it has to secure the passage of new legislation and exercises its powers under a running commentary from the House of Commons. Although the organised opposition of former days has been replaced by what is a mere machinery for arranging debates, there has been constant and useful sniping from the back benches. In one important respect, however, the House of Commons has been unfaithful to its democratic responsibilities.

The essential function of Parliament during the war, or indeed at any time, is to bring public opinion to bear on the Government and to enable public opinion to be led by the public expression of differing points of view. Members of the House of Commons are not experts in anything ; they are mere representatives of ordinary men and women. The questions which they ask ought to be the questions that ordinary people are asking. The criticisms which they make ought to be the criticisms of ordinary people. The answers to questions and criticisms are made in Parliament, but for the benefit of people outside. The Government must secure the support of the House of Commons because it must have the support of the people.

All this is elementary because it is implicit in the system of representative government. Yet the House of Commons has forgotten this elementary fact. It has developed the strange unconstitutional idea that representative government can be carried on by secret session. On numerous occasions there have been no important debates in public because the House has instead gone into secret session. There has been censorship because the one place where information can be most effectively given to the public and criticism voiced in public has been closed to the public.

Now no Parliament is competent—indeed, no Parliament can be trusted—to exercise a control over a Government in private. What is more, this present House of Commons is the worst possible instrument for the purpose. It was elected in 1935 during what Lord Baldwin has admitted to be a deliberate suppression of information about the international situation. It supported Mr. Chamberlain's appeasement policy by immense majorities. It gave the Munich triumvirate a majority a few days before the German irruption into Holland and Belgium. Many of its members are the mere nominees of local party committees because they have been elected under the party truce. The great majority were elected to oppose most of the principles which are now being carried out by the Churchill Government. Such a House cannot be trusted to represent public opinion when the public does not know what it is saying. The public should not, does not, and cannot trust members to debate in private because a secret session gives opportunity for public opinion to be misrepresented. But the war can be won only if the strength of the people is made the strength of the Government, and vice versa.

Unfortunately the habit of secret sessions gives members a more than usually exaggerated

idea of their own importance and is therefore popular among them. It is necessary, therefore, to explain to them that they were not elected as experts on anything, but as ordinary men and women who happened to carry the right party labels in 1935. What they say carries weight if it is representative of a section of public opinion. It is possible to assume that their opinions are representative if they express them in public. What they say in private is of no interest to anybody but themselves, and is as valuable as the opinions of a Band of Hope on the relative merits of Scotch and Irish whisky. There may, it is true, be very exceptional occasions, as when conscription was proposed during the war of 1914-18, when special information should be given to members of Parliament. A secret session is then justified because the Government requires authority for a change of policy and it cannot state the reasons publicly. In such conditions it is necessary to rely upon members of Parliament, and in any case it is not the policy but the facts upon which the policy is based which are concealed from the public. But what has been happening in this war is that ordinary people out of Parliament have been denied, by the habit of the secret session, the opportunity of learning the Government's policy.

That must not continue. Government by

secret session is Government by an incompetent oligarchy, a fact which members should be made by their constituents to understand if they are, as they seem to be, incapable of understanding it for themselves. That is the first Parliamentary reform needed in this war and it is one which should never have been necessary. What of future reforms.

II

POLITICS AFTER THE WAR

THE Prime Minister's references to the campaigns of 1943 and 1944 have left us in no doubt about his view of the length of the war. It may seem foolish, therefore, to write about post-war reconstruction at this stage of the conflict. There is always the possibility that political conditions may be so fundamentally different that the forecasts of to-day are quite irrelevant. If in 1915 anyone had discussed the political future, he would certainly have been arguing from false premises. He would have assumed that there would be a strong Liberal party, weakened no doubt by the rapid growth of the Labour party, but still carrying on the great work of the Radical Government of 1905. He would have thought of Ireland and Free Trade as the great post-

war issues. He would have been unable to foresee that Mr. Lloyd George would split the Liberal party and that the Conservative Central Office would so manipulate the "coupons" at the election of 1918 that the Conservatives would achieve dominance for practically a quarter of a century.

Historical analogies, however, are usually false. This war has not followed the course of its predecessor, nor is there reason to suppose that political history will repeat itself. To those of the new generation who look back upon the politics of the present century, the Liberal decline appears almost inevitable, and the effect of the war of 1914-18 was merely to speed up the process. The Liberal Government of 1905 achieved an immense majority in 1906 because Liberals of all shades could combine in defence of Free Trade and because the Conservative Government of 1895-1905 had seemed to peter out into futility. Yet the divergences exhibited by the Liberal party during the Boer War, the conflict between the "pro-Boers" and the Liberal Imperialists, and its difficulties with its Labour supporters, had shown that there were two wings which could not long remain attached to the same body. On the one side was the more Radical element which was sympathetic to the growing Labour movement, and on the other the

conservative element which was not Conservative with a capital "C" only because it agreed with the Radicals in thinking that Tariff Reform was a means for protecting property at the expense of the people.

The position to-day is therefore very different from what it was in 1915. On the one side there is the Labour movement, socialist in its internal policy, internationalist in its foreign policy, and egalitarian in its imperial policy. On the other side are those who seek to maintain the privileges of "property", the Imperial supremacy, and an isolationist foreign policy. The division can never be very precise. Even the protectors of "property" recognise the need for substantial State control, and on the other hand even the most fervent socialists do not wish to socialise everything. Moreover, the relics of the old Radical tradition, who still hanker after *laissez-faire* while supporting the foreign and imperial policy of the Labour party, are to be found sometimes on the one side and sometimes on the other. It is nevertheless clear that the essential division remains and is likely to remain long after the present war is over. In other words, we are entitled to assume that after the war the Labour party will be on the one side of the House of Commons and the Conservative party, under whatever name, on the other.

It is of course true that the post-war settlement may somewhat modify the issues. If, as some of us hope, Great Britain forms part of a much wider federation, much of foreign policy, something of commercial policy, and perhaps something of colonial policy, will no longer be involved in British politics, because they will be issues for the federal electors. But these changes would not affect the foundations of party opposition in this country, nor would they change the essential characteristics of the British Constitution. Our parliamentary system would operate within the framework of a federal constitution ; the subjects with which Parliament is concerned would be diminished ; but within these limits our governmental system would operate in the same manner as if there had been no federation. The problem of the relations between Parliament and People would be essentially the same.

III

THE NECESSITY OF PARTY POLITICS

FROM time to time opinions are expressed that now that we have what is called a "truly National Government" (to distinguish it, no doubt, from the false National Governments

that were in power from 1931 to 1940), it would be undesirable to return to party politics. We have presented to us an idyllic picture of a Constitution where "none were for the party and all were for the State". Parliament, it is urged, should form a Council of State. The wisdom of the nation, it is said, should be pooled. Our leaders should put their heads together, not so that they can smash each other's skulls, but so that they can reach agreed solutions of our many and urgent problems. If we can pull together in war-time, it is asked, why cannot we do so in time of peace?

The assumption which underlies this mixture of many metaphors is that it is possible for people to reach the same conclusions from widely different premises. The coalowners no doubt think that, if the State must intervene in the coal industry at all (and they are prepared for this only when the industry is not making profits), its action should be limited to subsidising the industry so that uneconomic competition can be avoided and "reasonable" profits restored. The ordinary socialist believes that the profit should be taken out of the industry altogether and the monopoly of the coal-mines transferred from the present owners to the State. The "Council of State" argument assumes that the coalowners in the House of Lords, their

representatives in the House of Commons, and the socialists in the House of Commons, can somehow reach a conclusion which will be satisfactory to all parties. The example needs only to be stated to demonstrate the futility of the argument. If further demonstration is needed it is enough to ask how the autonomy of colonial peoples, as advocated by Liberal and Labour members, can be made consistent with the maintenance of Imperial control, as advocated by most of the Conservative members. The labels sometimes hide a concurrence of opinion ; sometimes they exaggerate such differences as there are ; but more often they indicate a fundamental divergence of opinion which no collection of metaphors can overcome. The basic assumption of democracy is that there are real and honest differences of opinion which can be settled only by counting votes after argument. The " Council of State " theory is veiled fascism. It assumes that opposition to a decision once taken is wrong and " unpatriotic " even if the opposer considers the decision to be disastrous.

Indeed, a one-party system or, what is the same thing, a no-party system, necessarily leads to fascism and bureaucracy. A Government which has to face an Opposition, when both have to appeal for a majority at the next

general election, must necessarily pay every attention to public opinion. It knows that it is mortal and that public opinion may, and almost certainly will in due course, cause its death. It is impossible to defeat a one-party Government except by a party split—in which case the democratic or two-party system is restored—or by revolution—in which case another one-party and therefore fascist Government will assume power. Accordingly, the task of a one-party Government is to “liquidate” opposition within the party and to put down opposition outside by abolishing those freedoms of speech, association and elections which are the foundation of the democratic system.

The argument from the War Governments is completely fallacious. A War Government has one task only to perform, to win the war. To this all its energies must be directed, and compromise is necessary on all differences that might hinder its achievement. In these days, too, the war cannot be conducted successfully unless the whole population is substantially agreed. Accordingly, if any substantial section of opinion is aggrieved, it is necessary to try to remove the grievance even if some of the members of the Government do not believe that the grievance has any foundation. Presumably, the Conservative members of the

present Government believe that the "means test" is just. On the other hand, the Labour members and a substantial body of opinion believe it to be unjust. It is recognised, however, that for the duration of the war it is a subsidiary question, because the situation will be worse for everybody if the war is lost. Accordingly, it has been possible to reach a compromise: but, when the war is over, we are entitled to assume that some people will think the "means test" to be just and others to think it to be unjust; and its future will necessarily depend upon the attitude which the electors take to the party programmes. If the post-war conditions are such that the "means test" remains a subsidiary question, the agreed solution may continue. If, however, a section of opinion continues to feel strongly about it, it must inevitably become a matter for political controversy, and no appeal for "national unity" will prevent parties from dividing on it.

It does not follow that the alternative to the one-party system is the two-party system. There is no reason to assume that the people will be divided into two camps on every aspect of internal, imperial and foreign policy. If the Conservative and Labour parties are divided on each, it is certain that many people will sympathise with the one party on one

issue and with the other party on another. Theoretically, there could be as many parties as there are political issues. We could have, for instance, separate parties advocating the nationalisation of the mines, protection for agriculture, temperance reform, the disestablishment of the Church of England, the independence of Scotland, the restriction of betting, the pasteurisation of milk, and the abolition of compulsory vaccination. In other words, there could be as many parties as there are subjects on which opinions might differ. No country has gone to such extremes, but some countries have a plethora of minor parties. There are many reasons for the maintenance of the two-party system, the chief of them being the fact that no reform can be carried except by a majority of the House of Commons, and accordingly minor differences must be compromised in order that major aims may be achieved. No intelligent elector ever agrees with every aspect of a party's policy ; but if he wants some things more than others he must support the party which is likely to get a majority for the former, and hope that he can also persuade the party of the desirability of the latter.

The experience of other nations has shown that a many-party system may be disastrous. Indeed, our own experience of the three-party

system, for instance, under the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929-31, has proved that the parliamentary system works well only when a Government has a majority in the House of Commons. Our post-war problems are certain to be too vast to be dealt with by weak Governments. Majority Governments are not necessarily strong. No one who has studied British foreign policy between 1931 and 1939 could say that even a Government with an immense majority is necessarily capable of governing effectively. Nevertheless, the Government with a majority is at least in a position to do so, whereas under the system of multiple parties we should never have a Government capable of doing anything except by means of back-stairs and probably corrupt negotiations between the leaders of minor parties. Much could be said on this subject ; but the need for strong Governments has been demonstrated so clearly by our experience of Lord Baldwin and Mr. Chamberlain that it is unnecessary to spend much time in proving that one of our main tasks after the war must be to get back to the two-party system.

IV

A "KHAKE" ELECTION?

A RETURN to party politics means a return to full and effective democracy. Precisely at what point should that return be made? This is an important question because it is a little difficult to prevent political leaders, whoever they are, from capitalising their success in the war by making an immediate appeal to the people so that they may carry on the peace as they carried on the war. Yet history tells us that such appeals have been disastrous. If one were asked which was our worst Government during the present century, the reasonably impartial person would probably answer that it was the Conservative Government which secured a continuation of its power by the "Khaki" election of 1900. There were several reasons for its weakness and futility, several of them being mixed up in the personality of Joseph Chamberlain. No other Government in recent history, with a large majority in the House of Commons, became so inefficient that it had to resign while its majority was intact, and so out of touch with public opinion that it dared not appeal to the people. The explanation was that it had appealed in 1900 before the post-

war issues had shown themselves. It did not appeal on the basis of its programme. It sought only to cash in on the popularity which it had obtained through its victory in the Boer War. The general election of 1918, however, supplies an even better example. Even before the armistice was signed, Mr. Lloyd George had decided to cash in, and the Parliament of 1918 to 1922 was undoubtedly the worst Parliament that we have ever had. Here again the issues of the post-war period were not clear. There was no real opposition to the Government. There had been some criticism of some aspects of the Government's activity, but Mr. Asquith's section of the Liberal party had given general support to the Coalition Government, and, until the election was decided upon, the Labour party was supporting the Government. Consequently, the election of 1918 was nothing more than a wangle.

The Conservative Central Office arranged with Mr. Lloyd George who should be the members for the great majority of the constituencies simply by conferring a "coupon" on those who seemed likely to be subservient. In this back-stairs intrigue Mr. Lloyd George, for all his cleverness, was a mere child, and the result was the return of a crowd of "hard-faced colonels" whose speeches would be in-

credible if they were not enshrined in the pages of Hansard. It was this crowd which determined what the British representatives could and could not propose at Versailles. In consequence, it is astonishing not that the Peace Treaties contained blemishes, but that they were so reasonable and intelligent as they were. Nor was the influence on British politics any better. The confusion which resulted was hardly cleared up in 1935, when the two-party system was fully restored through the definite choice given to the electors between the Labour party on the one hand and the Conservative party, with its "National" appendices, on the other.

Once more we must remember that history does not repeat itself: but nobody doubts that the problem of settling the post-war world is too vast and too important to be left to the chance of a manipulated "Khaki" election. This is not the place to argue what kind of peace settlement should be aimed at: indeed, it would not be possible, with any precision, to forecast the conditions in which peace would be made. We cannot fail to realise, however, that the peace will be as important as the war. Hitler is right in one respect; clearly there must be a "new world order". In this order Great Britain with the Dominions and other countries must play an unaccustomed

part. It is therefore desirable that there should be as much national unity in the making of the peace as there is in the conduct of the war. As soon as the peace is made, the parties will separate on the steps to be taken to bring the world back to peaceful avocations. But the peace is part of the war, and party politics should therefore be restored after the peace, and not before. In other words, there should be no election until the principles of the peace are settled.

It will not be an easy decision to take. The present Parliament was elected in 1935 on issues which are no longer relevant. There was, as Lord Baldwin has admitted, deliberate suppression of the information possessed by the Government about German rearmament. The election was fought on a foreign policy which is as dead as Munich and on a home policy which was a mere hang-over from the depression of 1931. If the war does not end until 1944 and there is no election until 1945, most members will have held their seats for ten years, and most of the others will have been re-elected under the party truce. It seems difficult, and indeed undemocratic, to suggest that a Parliament so elected should continue in existence for so long. There is, however, no good alternative. An appeal to the people by the present Government or by

any similar successor would be absurd. In the great majority of constituencies there would be no opposition, and the choice of candidates would be a matter of bargaining between the Conservative and the Labour machines. Such an election would be democratic only in theory. It would not indeed be an election. There cannot be an election unless there is party conflict, and there is no conflict while the two main parties are in agreement. If we want the peace to be settled on national lines and not to be the selection of a particular party which the other would necessarily oppose, we can do no more than leave it to the present House of Commons, badly composed and unrepresentative though it is.

The decision is the less hard because the peace really is part of the war. Our success will depend in large part not on the mere strength of our arms, our support from our allies, and the assistance from the United States. It will depend also on the kind of "new order" that the British Government proposes. The nations at present outside the conflict must be brought in, or kept favourably outside, by showing them that our victory is to their advantage. The nations under the German yoke must be taught to learn that their only hope lies in our victory, and that

any assistance that they can give, by ca'canny, sabotage or even revolution, will help towards a new order of which they will approve. In other words, our peace aims must be part of our war effort, and they must be put forward by the War Government in such a way as to show that they will not subsequently be denied by any substantial party in Great Britain. If this is done, the peace obviously becomes part of the war, and the war will be over not when armistice terms are agreed, but when the agreement for the new order has in fact been reached. The election should be held, therefore, only when peace is formally re-established, and the issues before the electors become clear.

V

THE FRANCHISE

POSTPONEMENT of the first post-war election is the more necessary because some changes in our representative system must be made. The present constituencies were delimited in 1918, when the population was a good deal smaller, when it was distributed very differently, and when women had not the vote on the same terms as men. During the twenty years' peace, the electorate in fact grew by

fifty per cent., from roughly 21,000,000 (allowing for the changes in Ireland) to more than 31,000,000, and there had been remarkable shifts in the population. The result was that the English counties were under-represented, especially in the neighbourhood of the large towns, including London. London itself was over-represented, though not so badly as the Welsh and Scottish boroughs and the Scottish counties. The variations were, however, very considerable. The constituencies ranged between the 168,000 of the Romford Division of Essex and the 27,000 of the Barnard Castle Division of County Durham and of Ross and Cromarty. In other words, the principle which the Conservatives used to call "One Vote, One Value" was very seriously infringed. Indeed, it was the Conservatives who suffered most from this lack of equality, since of the 119 seats with more than 60,000 electors, 95 were held by Conservatives or their allies; while of the 100 seats with less than 40,000 electors, only 59 were held by Conservatives or their allies.

This Conservative disadvantage was, however, far more than off-set by infringements of the other principle, that of "One Man or Woman, One Vote". In the first place, no account is taken above of the University constituencies, whose electors nearly all have votes

in other constituencies. There would be something to be said for the University seats if they were always, or almost always, filled by persons of special qualifications who had no connection with the parties and who took no part in ordinary political controversies. In fact, however, nearly all the candidates are put forward by party organisations, and the holders of the seats are nearly always Conservatives or their allies.¹ The effect of the University vote is to give the Conservative party nine or ten additional members of the House of Commons.

Far more important, however, is the fact that, apart from the Universities, there are two qualifications for the franchise. The one is the residential qualification which, subject to minor qualifications, would give equal weight to every vote if it stood alone. The other is the occupation franchise which is given to the occupier of premises of the value

¹ The exceptions are so few that they can be detailed :
Oxford : one Liberal in 1852, 1857 and 1859 ; one Independent (Conservative) in 1935.

Cambridge : one Independent in 1922.

London : Liberal in 1868, 1874, 1880 and 1885 ; Independent (Conservative) in 1925, 1929 and 1931.

Scotland : two Liberals in 1868 ; one Liberal in 1874 and 1880 ; one Liberal in 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929 and 1931.

Wales : Liberal since enfranchisement, except in 1923, when the seat was Labour.

English Universities : one Liberal or Independent since enfranchisement.

of £10 or upwards for the purposes of a trade, business or profession, and to the husband or wife of such a person. This double qualification is not due to an attempt by the Conservative or any other party to maintain itself in power by duplicating the votes of some of its supporters. From 1832 to 1918 there were two main qualifications for the franchise, ownership and occupation. In 1918 the ownership qualification was dropped, the occupation franchise limited to occupation for business or professional purposes, and the residential qualification introduced. The occupation franchise is thus a historical survival. Its effect is to double the weight of some voters in a completely illogical manner. Even if it could be contended successfully that "property" should have additional weight because of its "stake in the country", the occupation franchise would be the wrong method of bringing it about. The resident owner of a great estate has one vote only. The greater part of the business of the country is in the hands of limited companies which have no vote either as such or through their directors. Those who have the occupation vote are the small traders and the professional men like lawyers, accountants and doctors. There is no reason why these should be doubly enfranchised. The shop assistant and the

managing director of the huge multiple store have one vote each ; but the occupier of a lock-up shop in a back street has two votes, provided that he resides in another constituency. The net result is that about 26 million voters can exercise about 31 million votes. It simply is not possible to defend this system except on the basis that most of these double-voters are Conservatives and that the Conservative appeal is so weak that the party must always be given an advantage. Even allowing for uncontested seats, the Conservative party has only once obtained a majority of more than two million votes, in 1931. The balance between Government and Opposition has been so close, excluding 1931, that the fact is that the double votes have really determined the results of the elections. This is not democracy, but its negation. Clearly, then, "one man or one woman, one vote" must accompany the redistribution of seats which will be necessary before another general election is held.

Certain changes of less importance are also desirable. Some of these are too small to be set out at length, such as amendments of the law relating to the use of private motor vehicles. It is of some importance, however, that the power of dissolving Parliament is at present in the hands of the Prime Minister

and not of the Cabinet. It is true that the King has power to refuse, but this power is so dangerous in its operation that no monarch is likely to exercise it except in a most extreme case. Nor does it matter that the Prime Minister alone can dissolve, so long as he is in agreement with his Cabinet. The danger arises where the Cabinet splits, and the Prime Minister by an intrigue with his political opponents seizes a favourable opportunity to get rid of his "friends". The occasion has not arisen in this country. It might have happened when Mr. Ramsay MacDonald betrayed his Labour colleagues in 1931. He did not, in fact, advise a dissolution until the National Government had been formed ; but he might have joined with the Conservatives to appeal to the people on a programme of complete misrepresentation of his former colleagues' decisions without giving the Labour party the opportunity to catch up with the misrepresentations. Or, again, if there had been a Cabinet split after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Mr. Chamberlain might have called an election in spite of the fact that a majority of the Cabinet was against him. A similar situation in fact arose in South Africa on the outbreak of war. General Hertzog wished to proclaim neutrality, but the majority of the Cabinet decided to declare war. Never-

theless, the General advised a dissolution of the House of Assembly, and only the refusal of the Governor-General prevented complete confusion in South African politics at a most dangerous moment, when German raiders (for all they knew) might have been off Cape Town. It is unwise to put such great power into the hands of a single individual. The power came into the hands of the Prime Minister entirely by accident. Until 1918 the Cabinet always took the decision ; but in that year Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law, as the party leaders in the Coalition Government, alone decided upon the dissolution, and apparently the long delay since the last election in 1910 caused it to be forgotten that this was an innovation. Here, therefore, it is merely a question of restoring the old rule that it is the Cabinet that advises a dissolution of Parliament.

Possibly the most important question, however, is to be found in the qualities of parliamentary candidates. Under our system, the statesmen in charge of the policy of the country are drawn from the House of Commons. Their quality therefore depends upon the quality of the members of the majority in that House. This, in turn, depends upon the candidates put forward by the parties at the previous general election. It is thus funda-

mentally important to ensure that the ablest men and women of each generation should stand for election. This, incidentally, is one reason for insisting, as will be done later in this essay, that it is the duty of every person interested in social welfare to do all that he can to see that "politics" is a profession for philanthropists in the literal sense and not for self-seekers. It is also important, however, that the system of nomination and election should be the best that we can devise. It cannot be said at present that any party has solved the problem of obtaining the best possible candidates. For the most part, Conservative and Liberal candidates must finance their own elections. Praiseworthy and partially successful attempts have been made by some Conservative associations to finance themselves and their candidates by numerous small subscriptions. Generally speaking, however, the prospective candidate pays most, if not all, of the expenses of organisation—the rent of premises, the salary of the secretary, and the provision of secretarial assistance—and the candidate, when formally adopted, pays most, if not all, of the expenses of electioneering. This system means that only wealthy men can get into the House of Commons as Conservative members. Moreover, their sources of income must be such that they will continue

after they are members. Unless they are *rentiers*, they must have some profession in London such as that of lawyer, accountant, insurance broker or stock-broker which can be carried on in the intervals of parliamentary duties. Obviously, the number of persons who satisfy these conditions is extremely small. The ordinary wage-earner or salary-earner can never become a Conservative member. The business men there are rarely the ablest business men; the Conservative party has often talked about Conservative working-men (and there are many) but has never succeeded in getting any of them into the House of Commons. Even the lower middle-class, the "black-coated workers", are more conspicuous by their absence than by their presence. They are represented, if that is the right word, by the working journalists and the plodding junior barristers.

The Labour party's problem is not quite so acute. Most local and divisional Labour parties finance themselves, with substantial assistance from trade unions and sometimes co-operative societies, by collecting subscriptions and organising entertainments. They rarely expect any candidate to pay any substantial part of the election expenses. On the other hand, many constituencies, and most of the safest Labour seats, are in the hands

of trade unions who undertake to finance the candidatures. It is very desirable that there should be trade unionists in the House : it is equally desirable, however, that they should be the ablest men and women that the trade unions can produce. In many cases this is not so. The fact is proved by the small number of trade unionists who achieved high office in the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929. No doubt Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had a personal preference for "intellectuals". No doubt also some of the ablest ministers, like Arthur Henderson and J. R. Clynes, were trade unionists. No impartial person can admit, however, that the trade unionists in the House have played the part, whether in Government or in Opposition, that their numbers would lead us to expect. Those who followed closely the opposition to the National Government in the early years after 1931 will remember how essential it became to secure the return at by-elections of some of the "intellectuals" who had been thrown out at the general election. Most of the trade union seats remained firm (though because they were the safest seats and not because of the quality of their members), but their representatives in general had little of the parliamentary skill that was necessary to conduct successful opposition in an antagonistic house.

Lansbury and Attlee, and afterwards Greenwood and Morrison, were the people who bore the burden.

To suggest remedies for these difficulties is not easy. The Conservative party has from time to time considered the problem from its own angle, but it has never been able to go further than to suggest an extension of the subscription lists of its local associations. It is recognised to be grotesque that seats should be "bought" by promises to pay organisation expenses, election expenses, contributions to charities, and contributions to entertainments. Something would be done if any candidate or prospective candidate were forbidden to make personal contributions of any kind. But this restriction could be evaded by contributions through third parties. In some cases, for instance, it is not the candidate but his parent who "buys" the seat. It would be necessary, therefore, to go further and to forbid individual contributions above a certain sum—a rule which would apply to trade unions as to individuals, and would incidentally prevent large contributions to election expenses by "the Trade", the National Farmers' Union, the National Union of Teachers, and other "pressure groups" which have something to gain by securing representatives in the House of Commons. Such a restriction would in

fact compel better organisation of local associations and parties, and the larger these were the more democratic would be the choice of candidates. Something more positive is, however, desirable. It is not to be expected that the State could pay organisation expenses. On the other hand, it would be possible to go somewhat further in the assistance of candidates at elections. The returning officers' expenses were formerly borne by the candidates but are now borne by the State ; it was formerly necessary for the parties to secure the registration of their supporters, though this too is now done by the State ; the State carries one election address for each candidate free of charge. If anything more were done, it would probably be necessary to recognise the parties as an essential part of the democratic machine, as is done in the United States. If the State paid the authorised expenditure of any candidate officially recognised by a party up to a sum of, say, £400, and rigidly limited the amount which the party might spend in any constituency beyond this, the poor man, or the man of moderate means, would have a better opportunity of securing election. This would involve the determination of what was a " party ", and some test, such as the presence of, say, twenty members in the preceding House of Commons, would have to be adopted.

This sounds a revolutionary proposal, but it is in fact not greatly different from the practice which obtains in many American States. If the limits of expenditure were rigid enough, money would also play a much less important part in elections than it does to-day. Some method of obtaining good candidates is certainly necessary, since it is quite impossible for the democratic system to flourish in these days if the great mass of members are just second-rate and some of them are just duds.

VI

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

DURING the whole of the present century there have been complaints about the unbusiness-like habits of the House of Commons. Mr. Balfour's Government of 1902 can hardly be said to have been anxious to push reforms through the House; it had only a small Opposition; and such opponents as it had were divided among themselves. Nevertheless, it was compelled to make frequent use of the closure and the guillotine in order to secure the passing of its very exiguous output. The problem became even more acute when the Liberals came into power in 1905, because there was an accumulation of what were regarded by them as necessary reforms. For-

tunately, there has been a series of procedural reforms, with the result that the procedure is now far better than it has ever been. In the process, the importance of the private member has considerably diminished and the authority of the Government has correspondingly increased. This change is often made the subject of complaint, yet it seems to be fully justified by the changed circumstances. The old days of *laissez-faire* have disappeared. No party now assumes that the function of the State is to "keep the ring" so that competing private interests may assist themselves to profits and in doing so assist the public if it happens to be profitable to do so. Every Government introduces proposals for legislation which Gladstone and Disraeli alike would have described as "socialistic", and which would have shocked Cobden or Peel. Legislation of such magnitude, dealing with coalmines or housing or agricultural marketing or any other of the hardy perennials, cannot be left to the uncoordinated action of private members. The real legislation must now be Government legislation, and private members' Bills rarely deal with any problem of importance. Moreover, foreign affairs are even more important than they were in the days of the "Eastern Question" or the scramble for Africa. There is, too, a new conception of imperial responsi-

bility which requires that Parliament devote time to the work of the Departments concerned with the Dominions, India, Burma and the Colonies. All this implies a Budget which, even if no account be taken of the vast increase of the National Debt brought about by war, requires more complex financial legislation and swollen Estimates. The truth is that the Government business is the only business that matters.

The procedural reforms have much eased the situation. Every year there are passed three or four Bills which would have required each a session under the rules which passed muster while Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister. Nevertheless, there is always a shortage of time, and many days are still spent in uninteresting and unnecessary debates. It is no longer possible to say that sweeping reforms are necessary. What is required is rather a development of the existing technique and the abolition of a few historical survivals. Consequently, it is not easy to describe in a short space what these changes should be. They are so technical that, in order to explain them, it would be necessary to give a long account of the existing procedure.¹ Perhaps it will

¹ For the existing procedure, stated as non-technically as the subject allows, see Jennings, *Parliament* (Cambridge University Press, 1939) ; and for some reforms, see Jennings, *Parliamentary Reform* (Gollancz, 1933).

be enough to give some indications of the nature of the problem and the general character of the solutions.

It must first be emphasised that a popular assembly is not and cannot be a good legislature. Modern legislation, dealing with complicated industrial matters or a vast organisation of social services, is too technical for private members to contribute much to it. Members of Parliament themselves are apt to forget that they are just ordinary people elected not because of their special qualifications but because their general political opinions received support in their constituencies. On most subjects there are a few members with technical knowledge ; but this is, so to speak, by accident. There are, for instance, a few medical men in the House of Commons ; but they were elected not because they were medical men but because they were politicians. Even medical men, however, are not competent to deal with health or housing legislation because, though a knowledge of medicine is necessary for this purpose, so is a knowledge of local administration, finance, legal procedure and other matters which have to be included in the legislation. So far as could be judged from the debates, only two members of the House really understood the new grant system proposed by the Local Government

Bill of 1928-9. The one was Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who as Minister of Health had been coached by his advisers ; the other was Mr. Sidney Webb, who had made a detailed academic study of grants-in-aid. No doubt this is a slightly unusual example, but it is almost universally true that private members cannot contribute much to the actual text of legislation.

All this does not mean that their function is not important. Those who take the trouble—and many do—to find out what consequences a proposal will have, are certainly competent to discuss the desirability of those consequences. If they do not understand, they ask questions ; and if the answers are unsatisfactory it is a useful function to say so. Indeed, there may be no answer to the question, because it is quite likely that the official concerned had never thought of it. Having some definite difficulties in mind, he has submitted a scheme to deal with them, but perhaps has not realised that his proposals raise other difficulties. The private member, as a politician, may see that some consequences are undesirable. If he happens to have some technical knowledge, he may be able to criticise even the more technical proposals. Moreover, he may have behind him other persons who appreciate the difficulties involved ; they may be consti-

tients ; more probably they will be the council of some "pressure group" with which the member may be associated as member or vice-president or otherwise. Very often, in fact, the "pressure group" concerned circulates memoranda to members generally, or submits a brief to a particular member who has shown an interest in their particular problems.

Accordingly, general debate and detailed discussion in committee are not necessarily futile. It is indeed very desirable that the legislative process should not be scamped. After 1918, for instance, a good many very ill-digested proposals were passed through the House. This House was perhaps the most unintelligent that the country has ever had ; the Government was a set of units and not a composite whole, because part of it, including the Prime Minister, was more concerned with the peace settlement than anything else, and the old War Cabinet was kept going for several months ; and everybody was in a hurry to make the country fit for heroes to live in. It is undesirable that this process should be repeated ; at the same time it is equally undesirable to block the parliamentary machine so that the necessary reforms cannot be pushed through quickly. The problem of post-war parliamentary procedure is to avoid either of these extremes.

From the legislative angle, the introduction of a reform involves three things, the settlement of the principles, the working out of such details as are of general importance, and the provision of the necessary administrative machinery and the machinery for judicial control. These are in descending order of political importance. The principles are the basis of political controversy, and they are eminently suitable for public debate. It is necessary that the House should discuss them in public, not because they are likely to be altered (though this has happened sometimes, as with the Education Bill of 1898, where the debate went so much against the Government that the Bill had to be withdrawn), but because the process of educating the electorate must continue. The Government decides the principles, and generally the House does no more than approve them by a majority. But it is an essential part of the democratic process that every important question should be debated in public so that the appeal to the people to support or oppose the party in power may be constant. These principles must, therefore, be debated on the floor of the House. Generally, this means that the second and third reading of a Bill must be in the House. Sometimes, also, as with the Parliament Bill of 1911, the Franchise Bills of 1918 and 1928,

and a few other Bills which could be named specifically, nearly every detail is of such political importance that the committee and report stages must be taken in the House itself.

Generally speaking, however, the details of legislation are not of this order of importance. Opportunity must be given to members to make criticisms and to ask questions, because very often the importance of a provision does not appear until there has been discussion. The debates are not, however, of public importance. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that they are never mentioned in the newspapers and by the fact that the readers of Hansard are so few. Accordingly, it is enough to discuss these details in small committees. The members of these committees should be those who are most likely to make useful points. Nor is it necessary that there should be any debate on the details (as there is at present) when the committee reports to the House. In other words, what is wanted is that nearly all Bills should go to small and comparatively expert committees and should not be taken on the floor of the House itself.

Finally, the merely technical provisions which raise and can raise no political questions do not need to be discussed at all. Such provisions should be issued as Regulations

under parliamentary authority and not incorporated in Bills. The tradition against "delegated legislation", useful in so far as it prevents Ministers from claiming powers that they ought not to possess, should not result in the clogging of the parliamentary machine through attempts to debate unimportant and technical details.

Legislation is, however, but one aspect of the parliamentary function. Indeed, that function really is to debate political issues, and Bills are mere pegs upon which to hang political discussions. What we expect from Parliament is a constant attention to public problems and a continual education of public opinion by informed discussion. This function is interfered with not only by attempting to mould legislation through an instrument which is quite unfitted for detailed discussion, but also by certain narrow technicalities which limit the scope of other debates. For instance, the debates on the Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, which occupy between twenty and thirty parliamentary days, are restricted by technical rules based on the assumption that in these debates the House discussed finance. The assumption is false because the House never discusses finance except in the Budget debates. The debates in Supply, as they are called, are not debates on the money which is to be spent, but on

the policy involved in the expenditure proposed. The Ministry of Labour vote is put down not because members wish to discuss economy in the Ministry's administration, but because they wish to discuss unemployment. Because of the theory that it is money that is being proposed, however, members are prevented from making suggestions which, if carried out, would involve legislation. Again, because of the theory that the House must debate expenditure, the second reading debate on a Bill is often duplicated by means of a debate on what is called the financial resolution. Having approved a Bill in principle, the House proceeds to discuss a resolution to authorise the expenditure proposed by the Bill. The same arguments are used, but the second debate is subjected to slightly more stringent rules of order than the first. If members approve a Bill it is obvious that they approve the expenditure, and it is a mere waste of time to have the discussion over again. Having accepted the financial resolution, however, the House is (generally speaking) then precluded from making changes in the Bill that would increase the expenditure, so that sometimes the Government has to withdraw the Bill and submit it again, or submit another financial resolution for debate.

These are some of the technicalities which

interfere with the efficiency of the House of Commons. This is not the place to go into detail ; but enough has been said to indicate that the rules of the House even now do not enable it to carry out effectively the only function that it is capable of performing, that of focusing the national interest on the problems of the nation and securing that government shall be carried on according to the wishes of the people. The House of Commons is really two things. It is the means by which the needs of the people are brought to the attention of the Government ; and it is also the means by which the public debate on policy, which is the essence of democracy, is carried on. The House of Commons is the centre of the whole political machine, and it is essential that its work should be properly organised for the task.

VII

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

So long as a Conservative Government is in office, there is no problem of the House of Lords. The Conservative party has a permanent majority in that House which never seriously embarrasses a Conservative Govern-

ment. This is not to say that it performs no useful purpose. Some of its debates are valuable because a small minority of its members is highly qualified to deal with certain kinds of political problems. Its legislative function gives an opportunity for Government Bills to be "cleaned up" by drafting amendments, amendments consequential upon those made in the House of Commons, and amendments necessary to meet criticisms in the House of Commons. Occasionally, though rarely, the peers themselves make valuable changes. The House of Lords also shares the dull task of discussing private Bills, and provisional orders, and gives more attention than the House of Commons to "special orders" which require parliamentary approval. Actually, most of the work involved in private Bills and provisional orders is unnecessary since few of the provisions which they contain are worthy to occupy the time of the legislature. It is nevertheless clear that the House of Lords is not without its value, though it need not be placed very high, and not even the most die-hard Conservative would suggest that the composition of the House is adequate to its task. This is, however, of secondary importance so long as a Conservative Government is in office.

The position is quite different when any

other Government has a majority in the House of Commons. The Conservative majority in the House of Lords then acts in collaboration with the Conservative Opposition in the House of Commons. This does not mean that no proposal of a Liberal or Labour Government is passed. The Conservative party must not obstruct legislation merely because it disapproves of it. It must remember that it will normally have to appeal to the people within five years. Moreover, it would be a grave risk to use the House of Lords as a complete bar to all Radical or Labour legislation, because the case for abolishing that House would then become so obvious that the people would compel it. For instance, the House of Lords amended the Education Bill of 1906 out of existence because the Conservative party never hoped for support from the Nonconformists who were most anxious for the Bill to pass : but they allowed the (to them) even more obnoxious Trade Disputes Bill of 1906 to pass because a substantial section of the working class in England (outside Yorkshire and Durham) had consistently supported the Conservative party until 1906, and the party naturally desired not to antagonise these workers for ever. Indeed, most Conservatives now agree that it was tactically a mistake to reject Mr. Lloyd George's Land Tax Budget

of 1909. The general election literature of 1910 shows how difficult it was to rouse ordinary people against a Budget which merely attacked the wealthy. Though theoretically the first election of 1910 was fought on the Land Tax, in fact the Conservative party tried to fight it on the increases in the workers' "beer and baccy". They failed to carry the workers with them, however, with the result that the powers of the House of Lords were substantially cut down by the Parliament Act. The House can now do no more than delay a money Bill for one month or any other public Bill (other than a Bill to extend the duration of Parliament) for two years.

This power of delay is, however, still immense. Two years are an unconscionable time when it is considered that reforms are urgent. Nor is it just that a Conservative Opposition should be able to delay legislation when other parties must accept any changes made by a Conservative Government. Their case is weakened still further, as they themselves admit, when the composition of the House of Lords is considered. That six or seven hundred persons should have power to obstruct reforms merely because they are the sons of their fathers is one of the propositions which needs only to be stated to appear fallacious. During a war which is being fought for de-

mocracy our case is weakened by the existence of an institution which, to most democrats, is a ridiculous though no doubt picturesque historical survival.

What to do with it is another matter. The Labour party programme of 1935 asked for a mandate to abolish the House of Lords, but it was careful not to state whether it should be replaced by another second chamber. It would be no easy matter to abolish it even if it were not replaced. Its existing functions, other than that of general debate, must be performed by someone. The procedure of the House of Commons would need alteration if there was no revising body. The law as to private Bills and provisional orders would have to be amended, and the functions of the House of Commons in this respect would be almost doubled. The law as to elections and seats in the House of Commons would need modification. Something would have to be done with the judicial functions of the House of Lords. None of these difficulties is very great in itself. The point to be made is that the change could not be effected by a simple one-clause Bill which stated merely "The House of Lords shall be abolished". It would require a very complex measure which would take a long time to draft and an even longer time to pass the House of Commons.

What is more, it must either pass the House of Lords, which is incredible, or be held over for two years to pass under the Parliament Act. If it were passed under the Parliament Act all other reforms of a Labour Government, or coalition Government including Labour, would similarly be held up until it passed. In other words, it is easier to decide to abolish than it would be to abolish.

Is it beyond the bounds of practical politics to deal with the question by agreement? The experience of the Bryce Committee in 1917, which did not think it even worth while to report, suggests that it is. But, surely, the world has moved on since then. There is now complete agreement among Conservatives that the present House of Lords cannot be justified. It must surely be obvious to all that, among people whose opinions we value, especially in the Dominions and the United States, the existence of the privileges of the peers is one of the great weaknesses of our propaganda. On the other hand, it must be admitted by most Labour supporters that the House of Lords performs some useful functions, even if they are not particularly important. Moreover, the task of any future Labour Government will be immensely burdened, if not made altogether impossible, by this picturesque survival. For them it would

be worth while to compromise in order to remove the issue from party politics.

To secure agreement on any compromise would not be easy. The simplest of all changes would be to apply to all public Bills (except Bills to extend the duration of Parliament) the provision which now applies to money Bills. It would be the simplest because it would require a single clause. It would have the effect, however, of giving the House of Lords power to delay for one month only. It is not likely that the Conservative party or (what is in part the same thing) the House of Lords would accept this proposal. It is possible, if the case were made strongly enough, that they would accept a proposal for three months' delay, with one month for money Bills. Three months is one-third of the normal peace-time session, which runs from November to August. It would then be necessary for the most controversial Bills to be introduced early in the session and so one of the complaints of the peers, that they are generally given inadequate time for consideration at the end of the session, would be met. The delay of three months, accompanied as it would be by debates in the House or Lords and campaigns in the press and on the platform, would give an opportunity for public opinion to express itself: and public opinion is now

so powerful that a clear expression of disapproval would compel the Government to withdraw. It might also be provided that money Bills should be certified as such not by the Speaker of the House of Commons, as is now the case, but by a joint committee or a judge—so meeting another of the Conservative complaints. The House of Lords as such would then remain. It could, of course, be changed under the new Parliament Act, but the question would not be of sufficient importance to warrant a long political controversy. Certainly the Labour party would have too many other proposals to make to bother overmuch with the second chamber question. The strongest argument is, however, that if a change of this kind were made during the war it would be the clearest demonstration that the United Kingdom was, and intended to remain, a true democracy and that it was prepared, even when other matters were far more urgent, to strengthen its democratic Constitution.

VIII

EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION

LITTLE space is left to consider what is really the most urgent, though at the same time the most technical, constitutional question, that

of the efficiency of administration. The British administrative machine has some remarkable merits. It has avoided the spoils system ; it has produced a civil service whose quality can (for once) be truly described by the hackneyed phrase that it is the envy of the world ; it has avoided that conflict between executive and legislature which is the bane of most democratic systems. It is not, however, without its defects.

The war has shown that there is still too much "red tape". No doubt the difficulty has been much exaggerated. In war-time rapid action is often better than a delayed action which is better thought out. In peace-time, on the other hand, it is usually better to have ample consultation than to allow somebody to act on the spur of the moment. Not only does this avoid mistakes, but also it prevents corruption and political and personal favouritism. The "red tape" is primarily the result of the administrative controls upon which the House of Commons, especially through the Public Accounts Committee, has insisted. To give unchecked power to anybody is to run a serious risk of abuse, and to ask for immediate action is to vest unchecked power in individuals.

Nevertheless, it may reasonably be contended that the civil service has shown excessive

timidity during the past twenty years. In part, this is due to the weakness of the political control which we have had during most of that period, and it can be remedied only by obtaining better ministers. In part, it is due to the quality of some of the senior civil servants, who have tended to recommend the promotion of "safe" men rather than men with energy and initiative. The result is, of course, that such energy and initiative as there may be in the middle ranks of the civil service has been stifled. In part, too, the quality of the civil servants must be determined in part by the quality of the entrants during the past thirty or forty years. These difficulties cannot be overcome all at once. They can certainly not be overcome by bringing in people of the right political sympathies. For the Labour party or any other party to give the key posts to political sympathisers would be to introduce the spoils system, and to reform a good system by introducing a bad. The remedy really lies in the hands of the Prime Minister, who makes all the superior appointments, and who should pay less attention to the recommendations of the Treasury than he has paid in the past or, perhaps, should pay more attention, and should find out if the recommendations are made because the persons who are mentioned have shown energy

and initiative rather than caution to be their outstanding qualities. Further, there should be less reluctance to promote from the lower ranks of the civil service, and steps should be taken to enable the administrative class to draw upon a wider range of competitors.

Some of the "red tape" arises, however, from Departmental conflicts. This is due in part to the number of Departments and in part to the strange division of functions among them. On the question of the division of functions it is enough to say that the Haldane Committee in 1918 recommended a better distribution which has not been carried out.

The number of Departments is due to the prevalence of the notion that every new function must have a new Minister, and that every Minister is equal. The result is that as the functions of the State expand the number of Departments increase; and this has the further result that the Cabinet becomes too large to take effective and rapid decisions. Mr. Churchill has shown the way by taking upon himself the functions of the Minister of Defence, thus placing himself in control of the three Defence Departments which themselves have Ministers at their head. This is a precedent which can be followed.

Cabinet ministers should be concerned only with questions of a very general order. Mere

Departmental questions should be decided by Ministers and not by civil servants, but these Ministers should have a Cabinet superior. In this way the number of Departmental ministers would be increased while the number of Cabinet ministers would be decreased. The questions which most frequently arise between Departments, and which at present can be settled only by negotiation, would then be settled by the Cabinet minister in charge of the Departments. This reform, incidentally, might be brought in at once, and indeed it would secure a far better co-ordination of our war effort than is possible with our present very heterogeneous War Cabinet.

IX

THE QUALITY OF MEMBERS

WHEN all is said, however, it appears clear that the quality of our government depends essentially on the quality of the House of Commons and the influence which public opinion brings to bear upon members and upon the Cabinet. The technical problem of improving the quality of the House of Commons has already been considered. It will be seen, however, that in the end the quality of government by the people depends upon the

people themselves. If they regard "politics" as a matter for a few enthusiasts; if they insist that "all politicians are the same"; if they pretend that the racing and football results are more important than the most urgent questions of public policy; in these circumstances our democracy must inevitably be inadequate. Politics in a democracy is not a game but a matter of bread and butter and the future of our children. It should now be obvious to everyone that foreign affairs, for instance, is not an academic subject to be left to the cloisters and classrooms of our Universities, nor an aristocratic game played in the drawing-rooms within a mile to the west of Piccadilly Circus; it is a matter of life and death to millions. The men and women of 1914-18 have seen their sons and daughters carried off to war and their homes blasted by bombs. Do the men and women of 1939-40 want an even more terrible war in twenty years' time? To conduct foreign policy is not an easy task; it would be far easier, however, if we had a truly instructed democracy. Soothing speeches and misleading programmes (such as those of 1935) would then be impossible. When Mr. Baldwin stated with "appalling frankness" that he had deliberately misled the electorate in 1935 because he wanted to get a majority, his state-

ment demanded not merely a censure of himself and of his party, but also of the people who had paid so little attention to what was happening that they could be so cynically misled.

The lesson has been taught in the realm of foreign policy, though whether it has been learned is not yet apparent. It is equally important, and for post-war purposes even more apparent, in the realm of domestic policy. Government by the people means that the people must think seriously of the task of governing. Admittedly there has been much improvement. To those who have looked at the party leaflets of 1900 or 1906 or 1910 it appears astonishing that the people could be such fools. Even now stories about "red letters", "bankers' ramps", "seizure of savings banks deposits", and the rest, can be used by cynical and unscrupulous politicians. If a slogan is believed to contain a truth and not merely to remind one of a truth, our democracy is at least imperfect and at worst a sham.

"Education" is a depressing word because it suggests the dogmatism and the dullness of information retailed secondhand by an oppressed pedagogue who wants to get home to his detective novel. Yet Robert Lowe was almost right in using the phrase which has

been shortened to "We must educate our masters". His only mistake was to use the "we"; for clearly it is the duty of the people to educate themselves. This means that they must use the books in the public libraries and read the more intelligent bits in the more intelligent newspapers. If it be urged that the more popular newspapers contain little or nothing that is intelligent, the answer is that they cater for the demand, and that if there is a demand for intelligence instead of silly snippets they will supply it. The newspapers at the beginning of the century were far more thoughtful publications because their circulation lay among the more thoughtful sections of the middle class. It is true that they were also deadly dull, but the better American newspapers have shown that the most accurate news-reporting and the most intelligent leader-writing can be combined with a sprightly and interesting style. The revival of the pamphlet and the vast circulation of "Penguins" has shown that already there is a demand. Our task now is to spread to all sections of the population the interest in politics which was normally shown by the Victorian paterfamilias.

But something more is required than this rather negative attitude. It is not enough to be interested in politics; it is necessary also

that a far larger section of the population should be actively engaged in politics. The Conservative associations should not be restricted to a few local big-wigs who can be "touched" for an odd £50 at every election. The local parties should be mass organisations and not committees of enthusiastic but sometimes hare-brained propagandists. The parties are the foundation of our democracy, and substantial sections of the population should take part in their operation.

If this is done, and if the obstacles in the path to the House of Commons are removed in some such way as is suggested in a previous section of this pamphlet, the quality of the candidates and therefore of the members and therefore of the Cabinet must inevitably be improved.

The future of our democracy is not so much a matter of measures as a matter of men and women.

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